

NEWS

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RISE IN WEST NILE CASES CONCERNS HEALTH OFFICIALS

The Central District Health Department (CDHD) has seen a dramatic rise in the number of West Nile fever cases in Ada and Elmore counties over the past month. Since July 1st epidemiologists at CDHD have counted 11 laboratory-confirmed cases of West Nile fever, four of which are the more serious neuroinvasive form. There are also a number of other suspected cases.

"We know that West Nile has been present in Idaho since 2003," Said Nikki Sakata, Manager of the Epidemiology program at CDHD. "But the recent spike in activity concerns us because we're not sure the public is getting the message that they need to 'Fight The Bite' and protect themselves from mosquito bites and West Nile disease."

The spike in activity has led Sakata's Epidemiology Department to alert physicians within the health district to be more vigilant in reporting confirmed and clinically diagnosed cases of West Nile fever to the Epidemiology, Surveillance and Community Assessment Program at CDHD.

For perhaps 80-percent of the people bitten by infected mosquitoes there will be either no symptoms or only the mild form, which is usually indicated by a fever and headache. In about 20-percent of the cases symptoms might include fever, headaches, fatigue, malaise, nausea, vomiting and sometimes swollen lymph glands or a skin rash. Symptoms can last from several days to several weeks.

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In less than one-percent of the cases, typically among those over the age of 50, the most serious form of the disease results. Symptoms of this form of the disease, sometimes called the neuroinvasive form, may include high fever, headache, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, muscle weakness and paralysis or death.

The history of the disease indicates that August and September are typically the months with the highest number of West Nile cases. However, the number of West Nile cases reported so far this year already far exceeds totals for the entire state last year.

Anyone bitten by an infected mosquito stands the chance of contracting the West Nile virus. Health officials urge people to take precautions to protect themselves from all mosquito bites. The precautions include:

- Insect-proof homes by repairing or replacing screens;
- Reduce standing water on property that provides mosquito breeding habitat, such as bird baths and decorative ponds;
- Cover up exposed skin when outdoors;
- Apply insect repellent approved by the EPA to exposed skin and clothing. Follow instructions on the product label, especially for children;
- Avoid mosquitoes when they are most active at dawn and dusk.

“The fact is that West Nile Virus is now a permanent part of our environment,” Sakata said, “We have to learn to live with it and the best way to do that is to protect yourself and your family from mosquito bites.”

If you believe you have West Nile fever you should consult with a physician, who will be better able to diagnose your condition. For more information on West Nile Virus please visit the CDHD website at www.cdhd.idaho.gov or go to the State of Idaho West Nile Virus website at www.westnile.idaho.gov.

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